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Touting his "Suburban Agenda," U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, appeared on Friday before business and community leaders from Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Des Plaines, Hoffman Estates, Mount Prospect, Palatine, Prospect Heights, Rolling Meadows and Schaumburg.

The forum at the Rolling Meadows Holiday Inn was hosted by the Chambers of Biz 6 Plus, which is a collaboration among eight suburban chambers of commerce, and B&F Technical Code Services Inc.

Kirk, who was re-elected over Democrat Dan Seals in November, focused his comments on a number of issues affecting the region, including transportation and business-friendly legislation.

Among his top priorities for his fourth term in Congress will be "suburban" issues, like securing funding for infrastructure improvements such as the proposed STAR Line and the O'Hare Modernization Project (OMP). Kirk said the STAR Line is essentially to the continued prosperity of the city as well as the suburbs.

"As you all know, living in Illinois is living in traffic and the only way mass transit works is if it is clean, safe and convenient and if it works, it works like a charm. For us our new commitment is building the STAR Line ... which lays the expansion for the entire Chicagoland region," he said.

While the total tab for both the STAR Line and the OMP adds up to more than \$16 billion, Kirk, citing the successes of Metra's new North-Central Line, said the end result will be well worth the investment.

Opened in January 2006, the \$150 million North-Central commuter heavy rail line is the region's fastest growing.

Fielding questions from the audience, Kirk touched on a range of topics:

- On the recent Iraq troop escalation, which Kirk voted against: "I have great concerns about the surge ... I looked at the surge when the proposal came in, and it was the first time I have seen a troop surge proposed by an outside consultant, the American Enterprise Institute. Our commanders felt that their were strategies that were better and, in our discussions, I saw that as well. So, I had my concerns and I presented those concerns to the president."
- On the controversy surrounding poor conditions at the Walter Reed National Army Medical Center: "We've voted, I voted earlier this week to keep open Walter Reed and dramatically upgrade the quality of care that is given to our men and women in uniform ... What was good about the Walter Reed situation is Secretary (of Defense) Robert Gates' leadership style ... he fired the commanding officer and he is putting in a culture of accountability within the army medical command. I am in favor of a full Congressional investigation."
- On state Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposed Gross Receipts Tax: "I'm worried about the business climate of our state ... I'm worried because this one tax on businesses is about 1.8 percent so for every \$1 million in revenues, you would pay \$18,000 extra."